

To the Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is David Clark. I live in Woodbury. As a volunteer for Donate Life Connecticut, I am here to support HB5333. My wife Heera was an organ and tissue donor.

I learned of Heera's desire to become a donor the day after we got engaged. She took me for a walk across the Golden Gate Bridge. There were some things she wanted to talk about before we got married. She showed me the place where they dropped her brother Kumar's ashes after he suffered a long painful death from leukemia. She said she never wanted to die that way. And then she talked about wanting to be an organ donor. She said that in her dying she hoped she could help someone else live.

Eight years later, Heera was in an accident. After a seven hour operation to save her life, the doctors said her brainstem was destroyed and that she would never regain consciousness. Now I knew Heera wanted to be a donor. The problem was my 76 year old Hindu mother-in-law who had just moved from India to live with us. Naniki was very religious, praying for hours every day. I knew Hindus believe cremation liberates the soul from the body. But I wasn't sure if cutting out the vital organs first would somehow violate Naniki's beliefs.

When I told the doctors that Heera wanted to be a donor they quickly left the room leaving me alone with Naniki and my pastor Mike Moran. Naniki was hard of hearing and didn't understand anything the doctors and I had just said. When I told her Heera was going to die she cried out, "My God, my God, why do you keep taking my children. What have I done so wrong? Please take me, not Heera."

And then I told her that Heera wanted to be an organ donor. And she scowled at me. "She is your property. You can do with her whatever you wish." I didn't know what to say. We just stared at each other for what felt like eternity. Finally, she turned to my pastor and said, "You are my messenger from God. What do you say?" Mike Moran said she will give life. "Then this is okay with me," Naniki said. And it was okay with her. Later, she said she knew what organ donation was and had no problem with it. In the horror of that moment, she was afraid I was going to bury Heera and not have her cremated.

Nothing will ever change the pain of losing Heera. But every time I hear an organ recipient talk about having been given the chance to see their kids grow up, or watch them graduate high school, or see the birth of a grandchild, I think fondly about what Heera told me that day on the Golden Gate Bridge. She said organ donors don't just offer a gift of life; they allow dreams to come true. And Heera did just that. Through her awareness and caring, Heera saved or enhanced seven lives.

Organ and tissue donations save lives. Increased awareness will save more lives. Please support HB5333. Someday, it may be your life, or the life of your child, or grandchild, that it helps save.